

OXFORD PAMPHLETS ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

No. 1—DOUBLE PAMPHLET

---

# THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

BY

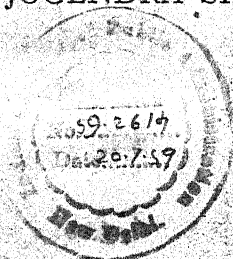
A. J. APPASAMY

SIR ABDUL QADIR

R. P. MASANI

SIR SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN

SIR JOGENDRA SINGH



HUMPHREY MILFORD  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

How is the unity of India to be maintained in the face of cultural diversity? This is the question which five contributors, members of the major communities of the country, set out to answer in this pamphlet. Such cultural differences as exist are associated with religion, but religious differences ought never to give rise to communal strife: 'the great religious teachers speak with one voice.' Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Mr R. P. Masani see hope for the future in a new world-religion, the religion of Humanity, but Dr Appasamy points out that 'neither the Christian nor the Muslim will agree to a complete synthesis of religions'. Nevertheless, though they would not go all the way with Sir Jogendra Singh in his assertion that it would be hard 'to prove any difference in culture among ninety per cent of our population', all the contributors are agreed that to create separate cultural regions would be as deplorable as it is unnecessary. In the words of Sir Abdul Qadir, the surest approach to the goal of a united Indian nation is by 'a frank recognition of the existing differences, and a serious effort to minimize them and to accelerate the process of fusion of cultures'. Several ways in which cultural divergences can be reduced are suggested.

*First published, July 1942*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

AMEN HOUSE, LONDON, E.C. 4

Edinburgh Glasgow New York

Toronto Melbourne Capetown

Bombay Calcutta Madras

HUMPHREY MILFORD

PUBLISHER TO THE  
UNIVERSITY

PRINTED IN INDIA

AT THE WESLEY PRESS AND PUBLISHING HOUSE, MYSORE CITY

## By A. J. APPASAMY

RECENTLY a distinguished Indian Christian said at a conference: 'My ideal for India is *one* Indian society with *one* Indian culture.' These words are quite significant in view of the pressing problem of national unity in India. Men of all shades of thought are seriously concerned with this question today. There are many different communities in India—Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, Sikh and Christian—each with its own cultural background and heritage. In this paper I shall consider the differences in the cultural life and traditions of the various communities and their bearing on the question of national unity. We may begin with the possibility of the emergence of one type of culture for the whole country.

### Cultural Differences are Religious Differences

The cleavages in the culture of India follow mainly religious lines. There are different types of culture associated with Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism and Christianity. Cultural differences might have followed provincial, linguistic or racial lines but they do not. There is a great deal of difference between a strong, well-built Punjabi with his vigour and energy and a Tamil, short of stature and dark in colour, with his religious fervour and his face 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought'. And yet they are both Hindus. There is a real unity in their

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

culture. They have both been brought up on the same old stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. They have both gazed on the same symbols and images in the temples. Again and again one is impressed by the intimate association of the culture of India with its different religions. Recently I saw the performance of a play called *Rup-Sanatan*. Some Government officials of Madras formed themselves into an amateur dramatic society and acted it. They had a large and interested audience. The play centred round the Bengali saint, Chaitanya. It showed how a man called Sanatan, a minister under a Nawab of Bengal, was so attracted by the figure of Chaitanya that he decided to give up his political work. The Nawab was loath to lose his services and imprisoned him. Sanatan's wife begged him not to leave her. But neither his respect for the Nawab nor his affection for his wife could counteract the great attraction which he felt for Chaitanya. The whole interest of this play is religious. The ideal of the renunciation of all worldly ties in response to the call of religion belongs to the very core of Hinduism. Not only in Hindu drama but in Hindu poetry, architecture, music and dance, the religious motive is predominant. In perhaps no other country is religion so truly the heart and soul of culture.





## A. J. APPASAMY

### Can there be a Synthesis of Religions?

The close affiliation of culture with religion has an important bearing on the question of the unification of culture in India. The different cultures in India can really become one only when the different religions become one. On the question of the unification of religions there will immediately be sharp and vigorous division of opinion. Christianity and Islam will never agree to merge in the other religions of India. They both claim to be the supreme revelation of God and regard it as their primary duty to preach their message to all those outside their own fold. Hinduism is not rigid in this respect. It is willing to accept the prophets and seers of other religions and to follow them. Buddhism originally began as a protest against the priestcraft, caste and animal sacrifices of Hinduism. For some centuries Buddhism flourished in India and its message of love captured the hearts of many, but gradually it was absorbed into Hinduism. Buddha became an incarnation of Vishnu. The final victory of Hinduism was achieved when the philosophical tenets of Buddhism were given a new setting and exposition by Sankara, the great Hindu philosopher. The Hindu declares that God cannot be really known and understood. There is not a single prophet or even *avatar* who has known God as He actually is. Prophets and seers catch only glimpses of the Divine Being; these glimpses are not necessarily consistent; there can be entire

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

consistency only when the whole truth about God is known, and that is not possible. With this idea that Truth is many-sided and that different prophets may understand different aspects of it, Hinduism is quite willing to regard all religions as equally true and valid. Where there is a synthesis of religion, synthesis of culture will become easily possible. But, as I have pointed out, neither the Christian nor the Muslim will agree to a complete synthesis of religion.

As a matter of history no such synthesis of religion or of culture has taken place in India. The beginnings of Hinduism are lost in the dim past. Christianity has been in India practically since the days of the Apostles. Islam has been in India from the twelfth century onwards. Though these three religions—Hinduism, Islam and Christianity—have existed side by side for several centuries, they have not become one. With their different types of culture they have always lived apart.

### The American Example

This matter of the synthesis of the different types of culture in India may now be looked at from another angle. America has been called the melting-pot of the nations. To be quite accurate, it is the melting-pot of the European nations. One may see at work there the process of the unification of different cultures. In a real sense all European culture is one. The Englishman will visit Paris to hear operas and spend days in

A. J. APPASAMY

Florence studying the great paintings there. In the realms of music, drama, poetry and architecture there are many features common to all Europe. While this is quite true, there are subtle differences between the cultural heritage of Germany, France, Italy and England. In America we can see these subtle differences merging together. The people who have settled down in America have come from all the countries of Europe with their diverse cultural traditions and ideals and yet they have practically ceased to be French, Germans or Italians and become Americans. Their culture has attained a distinctive and unified character. Every year several thousand immigrants enter the country. The State makes it a special task to enable these new settlers in the country to become one with the older inhabitants in their political and cultural life. With this end in view ample facilities are provided for the education of the new settlers. They are all taught carefully the use of the English language, which immediately serves as a common bond between the new arrivals from the different countries of Europe. The political and social ideals for which America stands are instilled in them. The new generation of settlers gradually becomes assimilated with the older stock and there is a genuine fusion of different cultural traditions. Year by year the process of assimilation goes on slowly and surely. The conditions which prevail in India are altogether different. The men who follow different types of culture have lived side by side

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

for centuries. No serious or steady attempt has been made to bring these diverse streams of culture together.

It is clear, then, that no fusion of different types of culture is possible in India. We may even go a step further and say that no such merging of cultures is even desirable. India is such a fascinating country to live in because of its wide divergences in thought and in practice. Without leaving the shores of India we may see many living religions at work, hear a multitude of languages, some of them with books written far back in history, and note immense varieties in architecture ranging from the beautiful mosques and palaces of North India to the stately temples of South India. On no account do we want a diminution of this wide variety of types. It would be a great pity if we could travel from one end of India to the other and hear the same songs or see the same dances. The many differences among the cultural types of the land give a real zest and interest to life.

### Fissiparous Forces

If, then, different types of culture should remain in India, what is to be their relation one to the other? I am afraid that so far no serious effort has been made to bring about mutual understanding and sympathy between the different communities. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis have lived side by side. Often they have mingled together in the office, the court-house or the

market-place, but they have not gone beyond such surface relationships and have lived apart in the cultural realm. The Hindu knows little or nothing about Muslim poets and thinkers. The Christian is equally to be blamed; he is ignorant of the traditions and ideals on which his neighbours, whether Hindus or Parsis, are brought up.

When missionaries from Europe came to India and baptized converts, they were particularly anxious that the new Christians should live alone and apart. They were taught to worship in churches which were built exactly like the churches in Europe and America; they were exhorted not to read Hindu literature, for it contained stories about Hindu gods and saints. In these and other ways the difference between Christians and the followers of other religions was marked out as carefully as possible. I am glad to say that a new outlook has come among Indian Christians now. It is felt that such attempts to separate Christians from others are unwise. In a country with many different groups it would be sad to establish another community which would cherish its exclusiveness. The Indian Christian of today feels that he has a real share in the heritage of India. Music, poetry, architecture and literature have been developed in India through long centuries by men of rare intellectual and spiritual gifts. The Christian in India is as much an heir to these ancient and beautiful treasures of literature and art as others living in the country. He will not accept all the religious stories and doctrines

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

behind the culture of India, but he will sing Indian music and offer his praises to Christ in melodies racy of the soil. Lyrics are written by Christians who have a real command of the vernaculars and an accurate knowledge of the laws of Indian poetry and who express their Christian experience in forms which are in harmony with the best literary traditions of India. This is not a synthesis of Christian and Hindu culture but a living adaptation and transformation of Hindu culture for Christian purposes.

There have always been divergences between the religious groups in India. In recent years, however, these divergences have been increased and multiplied. We may well ask who are responsible for deepening the gulf already existing between the different communities in India. In every religion there are narrow-minded people who refuse to see anything good outside their own circle. Some of them are quite sincere in their conviction. They really believe that they possess knowledge and experience which others cannot attain. In present-day India we find also many politicians who feed the flame of communalism. To put the best possible construction on their motives, some of them genuinely think that in a country like India, with such large and divergent groups, democratic forms of Government are really impossible to work. Others add to the confusion already prevalent in the country among the different communities and seek to make political capital out of it; some of these are probably in quest of

## A. J. APPASAMY

high and responsible offices as leaders of their respective groups.

### Cultural Harmony

There is no reason to fear that men of different communities cannot live in peace under a common Government. The supreme example of peace and harmony among the different religious groups in India is furnished by the reign of Akbar the Great. In his days no man was penalized because of his religion. He repealed the hated *jizia*, which Muslim rulers collected from their non-Muslim subjects. He treated all his subjects alike. He had many friends and allies among the Hindu princes. Among his ministers was a distinguished Hindu, Todar Mal. Akbar had the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* translated into Persian. He held that every religion contained elements of good. In the beautiful city at Fatehpur Sikri which he built, he brought together devout and learned men of all faiths—Jesuit fathers, Parsis, Brahmans and Muslim doctors. In the south of India in the Hindu state of Travancore there is an ancient Christian community. Syrian Christians have lived in Travancore for several centuries in peace, holding their own beliefs and following their own methods of worship. Though a minority community following a different religion from that of the State, their position has always been one of high prestige and rare privilege.



## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

### Cultural Regions and Nationalism

The proposal to establish cultural regions such as Pakistan is extremely dangerous to the future well-being of India. Instead of welding the people together, which ought to be the ideal of every lover of India, these cultural regions will only bring about more confusion and discord. Some of the best Christian opinion in India is opposed even to special provisions for communal representation. These again introduce and accentuate the fissiparous tendencies unfortunately already inherent in Indian life. The Christian claims the right of freedom of worship and is willing to concede this right equally to the followers of other religions. Further provision for his separate well-being he does not require. He is eager to remain a citizen of a free and united India, taking his chance along with others for political and social leadership. He is convinced that real merit will always win its way in the long run. If he fears in any way that he will be overwhelmed by the majority communities in India, he is willing to immolate himself on the altar of India's freedom and unity. He does not seek position and privilege for himself as the member of a special community, because all such communal representation, whether in legislatures or in offices, is sure to retard considerably the growth of a united India.

In this paper I have been concerned primarily with the question of cultural unity. National unity is of many degrees and types and embraces

## A. J. APPASAMY

several spheres of political, social and economic activity. Unity in culture is really an important step forward to political and social unity. If men following different modes of culture come to know each other intimately and understand and sympathize with other points of view than their own, they have advanced definitely on the road to political unity. The consciousness of national unity which surges through the country makes it imperative that people holding different traditions and ideals of culture should not live apart, ignorant of the deeper significance of their differences, but should understand each other clearly and move with each other with respect and tolerance.

### The Diffusion of Culture

It may be said, however, that this type of cultural unity can only prevail among educated people. While every educated man is not a cultured person, generally speaking, no cultured person is uneducated. It is quite true that there are, for instance, many Indian women who, while they are ignorant of letters, are steeped in literature. They may not be able even to read or write, but they know by heart many of the beautiful poems, lyrics and stories of India; these make them truly cultured. Such exceptions, however, only prove the rule. It is quite true that, on the whole, cultural unity of the type of which we have been speaking prevails only among the better educated section of the people. And yet

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

where there is such a large percentage of illiteracy, some of the most philosophical and abstruse ideas such as *Karma* and *Advaita* sink into the mass-mind through popular expositions of the religious classics by wandering preachers and singers. The cinema is now mediating to the masses some of the finest culture of the country in a form which they can understand and appreciate. I saw a Tamil film entitled *Sakuntala*. This is based on Kalidasa's famous Sanskrit drama. The setting of the story—the life in the forest hermitage, the devotion of the disciples to the *rishi*, the constant prayers and meditations in which they were engaged, the close contact with beautiful Nature and the love and tenderness for animals—shows Hinduism in some of its finest aspects. Against this distinctive Hindu background the story of the love of Sakuntala and Dusyantha is acted. The human interest of this love-story, shown on the screen with all the skill and beauty which the modern film-maker knows how to use, drew together a large audience including men and women, the educated and the illiterate, and various representatives from the different faiths. Few of these could have or would have read Kalidasa's play in the original Sanskrit or even in a translation. The film-makers had no intention of playing any part in bringing the different communities together, but they did succeed in creating interest and knowledge among people of different communities of some of the deepest and noblest truths for which India has stood through the ages.

The Influence of the West

We may close with a reference to the place and importance of Western culture in India today. Its impact upon different levels of social and intellectual life in India has been altogether for the good. The study of English has played an immense part in welding men from all over India together and in creating a sense of solidarity and unity. Some of the highest ideals of freedom and democracy have now become a valuable part of our intellectual possessions. The indirect influence of Western culture on the different vernaculars and arts of India is incalculable. Among Hindus a writer like Tagore and among Muslims Muhammad Iqbal have reacted in a striking way to the impact of Western culture. They are truly Hindu and truly Muslim respectively, but their outlook has been influenced by common Western ideals and they are much nearer together because of this debt to Western culture than they would have been if each had pursued his own way independently.

By SIR ABDUL QADIR

THE cultural problems of every country are complex; but they are particularly complex in a country like India, with its vast heritage of many cultures resulting from the intermingling of many races of humanity and many types of civilization, during the long course of its history. There are two schools of thought at present on the question of Indian culture. One of them emphasizes its essential unity and holds that there is really one culture in India, in spite of superficial differences noticeable here and there. Adherents of this school believe that the stream of this culture may have been formed by the flowing together of currents, coming from different directions and sources, and particularly by the two main currents of Hindu and Muslim culture, influencing and enriching one another, but, according to them, the culture of India is now the common property of all its inhabitants, and any efforts to represent its component parts as distinct cultures are to be deprecated. The other school holds that Indian culture is divided into several sections, existing side by side with one another, the two most important of these sections being the Hindu and the Muslim culture. It appears that the truth lies between these two extreme views. There is, indeed, a culture which the two principal communities existing in India have in common, but it is no use shutting one's eyes to the fact that in

many important respects the two cultures have preserved their separate entities and have defied the process of fusion.

I think it would be helpful to have before us some definition of the word culture, which is a somewhat indefinable and elusive term. Someone has observed that when we have forgotten much of what we have read in books taught in our schools or universities, the residue of knowledge that is left with us may be called 'culture'. This is an interesting definition, but it would apply only to intellectual culture. There is a good deal of knowledge which we do not get from books. Some of the best elements of the culture of an individual are imbibed by him with his mother's milk, or are acquired from the example of his father and elders. His surroundings in childhood and his associations in youth also affect his culture and form part of it.

#### The Way of Life of Different Communities

Among the instances of a community of culture in our country may be mentioned the more or less common mode of life of the bulk of the people of India. They believe generally in 'plain living'. Though it cannot be said that the proverbial counterpart is equally common among them, yet India has been as conspicuous as any other land for the number of people who have been distinguished for 'high thinking'. The dress of Indians is generally simple and, with the exception of a small number belonging to the

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

wealthy classes, they have always tried to restrict their needs to the minimum and to be content with the few luxuries and comforts that they may be able to get. The ideas prevalent among different classes of Indians on questions relating to rules of good conduct and morality, as well as their notions of charity and neighbourliness, are also the same to a large extent. There is a good deal that is common among all classes of people in the ceremonies observed on the occasions of marriages and deaths. The development of a common language and literature in Upper India and in some parts of the South has also been one great source of a common culture among Hindus and Muslims and other smaller communities. Another feature, representing a common ideal, is the approach of each to the realm of the spirit.

Along with these similarities, however, there exist many distinctions, and there is a desire in each community to maintain its respective peculiarities. It is difficult to say why it was thought necessary to adhere rigidly to these distinctions, but as indications of separatism they cannot be ignored.

In the domestic life of Hindus and Muslims, for instance, there is a distinction between the utensils used by them in their households. The metal favoured by the Hindus is brass, while the Muslims use copper utensils with a silvery coating of tin. You may occasionally come across individuals in each community who may use both

these metals, or, if they are westernized, they may be using utensils of aluminium or china or glass, but the broad distinction mentioned above between the two modes of life continues in most parts of the country.

The food of each community furnishes another striking instance of diversity. The majority of Hindus are vegetarians, while the Muslims are non-vegetarians or take a mixed diet of meat and vegetables. Of course there have always been some groups of non-vegetarians among the Hindus as well, and they are increasing under modern influences, but the description of their community as a whole as vegetarian applies truly to the vast majority of the community.

In the matter of dress also distinctions are noticeable, particularly in the way in which a piece of cloth is tied round the waist. A distinction is observable at some places in the style of the *kurta* (a shirt) worn by a Hindu and by a Muslim. There is distinction even in the way in which one's hair is to be cut or kept, and in the shape or style of what is used as head-gear.

Another point of divergence, which has persisted for centuries, is the difference between names of individuals in each community. A citizen of India can, with a fair amount of ease, distinguish a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh or a Parsi by his name. I do not think any other country in the world can produce an instance of this kind of difference in names to an equal extent. It is also significant that notions of nomenclature bring out, in one way or



## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

another, the characteristic features of the cultural background of each community. For instance, among the Parsis, whose main occupation is commerce, you will find that the names mostly represent their occupation or profession. The use of occupation as the basis of proper names is not uncommon among Hindus also, except that among Rajputs and Sikhs the martial spirit of these people finds expressions in the names of individuals. This last feature is also to be found in Muslim names among those classes who have military traditions in their families, but the feature which particularly distinguishes the Muslims is that they often include one of the many names of God as a part of their names. Prefixes are added to show that the individual takes pride in calling himself 'the servant or slave of God'. Similarly the name of the Prophet is introduced in Muslim names as a source of blessing.

### The Cultural Bonds of Literature, Music and Religion

In drawing attention to the above divergence between the cultural background of different communities, it is not my purpose to discourage in any way the laudable aim of trying to have a united India, held together by the bonds of a common culture. This purpose can be served best by a frank recognition of the existing differences, and a serious effort to minimize them and to accelerate the process of fusion of cultures.

It has been observed already that the nucleus

of a common literature exists and can offer a fruitful field for cultural fellowship between different parts of India. If Urdu literature continues to develop as it has done since the latter half of the last century, it has in it vast potentialities as a bond of cultural kinship between the various communities inhabiting this vast country. Though Delhi and Lucknow are regarded as the chief centres of the Urdu language, and some of the best-known masters of Urdu literature belong to these celebrated towns, yet by force of circumstances its influence has spread far and wide, and places like Hyderabad (Deccan) in the South, Lahore and Peshawar in the North, and Patna and Calcutta in the East, have made valuable contributions to its progress. Eminent Hindu writers have worked along with distinguished Muslim literary men to raise this literature to its present status, and it is noteworthy that even the numerically smaller communities in India have made their own contribution to its development. In the nineteenth century there were many Europeans who acquired such a good knowledge of Urdu that they could write Urdu verse, and many collections of their verses are still available. Christian missionaries from Europe have also had a good deal to do with popularizing the Urdu language by using its prose and verse, because they found in it a convenient medium for influencing a very large number of people. The Parsis, who are mostly settled in the Bombay Presidency, and have adopted Gujarati as their common language,

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

were not long in finding out that their language was akin to Urdu, and they had no difficulty in picking up enough Urdu for practical purposes. They were the first to start dramatic performances in Urdu and to procure Urdu translations and adaptations of well-known English dramas, and to stage old Indian stories. In consequence of this, Bombay has also done much to develop the dramatic branch of Urdu literature. Calcutta, the erstwhile capital of India, has also played an important part in the advancement of Urdu literature. If we take advantage of the natural growth of this literature, which is common to so many parts of India, we shall take a long stride towards cultural unity.

Music is a powerful ally of poetry—still the most popular branch of literature in India. Music has long provided common ground on which Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians can meet and forget for a few moments that they bear different names or wear different head-dresses or profess different religions. The art of music suffered because it had become practically the vocation of a small minority of professional men and women, who were looked down upon in society. Educated and cultured people enjoyed performances given by professional artists, but they did not ordinarily venture to play or sing themselves. Notions on this subject have now undergone a complete change, and educated young Indians are trying to cultivate the art of music. The community of tastes in this branch of art is

conducive to happy results in bringing about cultural affinity.

Another means of bringing together the different communities in India, and creating among them a genuine spirit of broad-minded human sympathy, is through religion. In spite of the fact that there are radical differences between the tenets of the many religions prevailing in India, there is an underlying unity among them, especially in the sphere of spiritual mysticism. The mystics of Islam, known as Sufis, have so much in common with the Vedantists among the Hindus that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish their main doctrines from one another. The ritual and the practices of each are also similar. A few centuries ago, the leaders of this school of thought among Hindus and Muslims saw the vision of an India united in spiritual culture, and men like the distinguished Muslim saints of Ajmer and Delhi, and other holy men like Guru Nanak and Kabir, worked for a unity of religious culture. In our time great men like the late Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the late Keshab Chander Sen saw the same vision, but unfortunately, under the stress of the present days of struggle and strife, a process of disintegration is at work, which threatens to endanger the good work done by these great men in the past. It is to be fervently hoped that the good seed, sown by such holy hands, will not be wasted, and India will one day attain that unity of the spirit which rises above purely material gains and considerations and

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

believes in the essential oneness of the human race and desires the combined advancement of the whole human family.

### What of the Future?

This dream of cultural fellowship among Indians, through religion, is not a new ideal. Aśoka had it long ago and Akbar visualized it again many centuries later. All credit to such great lovers of their motherland for having dreamt such a dream, and for having made an effort to materialize it in their own lives. Their plan was to evolve a common religion for the whole of India. Aśoka desired to put this ideal into practice with Buddhism as the religion of the country, but the effort did not succeed because Brahmanism, though overpowered for some time, re-asserted itself with such vigour as to drive Buddhism out of the country. The effort of Akbar was to introduce a new religion, which was to be a synthesis of all the known systems of faith, with himself as its arch-priest. This effort also died with him, because Islam as a dynamic force was too strong to be driven out of the field so easily. I am afraid it is a mistake to imagine that the different religions in India will disappear or merge into one synthetic combination of all. In my opinion the best ideal will be to seek unity in the midst of diversity, and to recognize that diversity of religious thought is bound to remain. There is a passage in the Holy Koran which says that God could have so moulded humanity as to have only

SIR ABDUL QADIR

one religion, but He preferred to test mankind, to see how they use their gifts of understanding and discernment. It appears that this diversity of thought is a part of the scheme of things and is quite in keeping with the scheme of Nature in other directions. The trees, the flowers and the fruits are a significant illustration of Nature's love of variety, with their different colours and flavours and perfumes. Let us recognize that all religions have a right to exist. With this broad basis of fellowship let us study them and respect them. This is what the Sufis and mystics of India, who based their spiritual conquests on sympathy and love, did in the past, and this is the spirit in which India may find the best solution of its cultural problems in the future.

By R. P. MASANI

The Impermanence of Cultural Differences

THERE is only one species of man the world over. The fundamental structure of the human mind is uniform in all races and human nature is also the same everywhere. Not a few, no doubt, are the differences in hygienic, economic, educational and ethical standards among the different members of the human family, resulting in cultural diversity. There are also apparent, on the surface, not a few contrasts between the cultures of one group of people and another. At the same time there are resemblances too. Man's emotions and feelings as well as his intellectual ideals, his love of beauty, his longing for harmony, his striving for perfection, his attachment to his country, are the same everywhere. Despite differences of tribe or race, clime or environment, the core of every culture is the same—the fundamental humanity of man.

The differences that exist are due to historical circumstances, passing social conditions and arrested stages of development. Undue emphasis is, however, laid on such diversity as appears on the surface, and impenetrable barriers are needlessly raised, owing to certain conventional beliefs of civilized society which are generally regarded as scientific truths and are propagated with an air of scientific knowledge but which, as a matter of fact, are based on a fragile framework of

superficial anthropological study. Of such beliefs the most harmful is that concerning the innate inequality of different peoples, their irreducible differences, physiological divisions and psychological limitations. It divides the human race into two types, one superior and the other inferior, and draws fantastic distinctions between men with white and black skins, those with broad and narrow skulls, those with thick and thin joints, those with straight and curved foreheads, those with small and large nostrils and those who are tall and those who are stunted. It is the mission of the scientist and the sociologist to correct such errors, and not a few true votaries of science have protested against such fallacious theories of inequality and immutability as having been based on incomplete investigation or inaccurate data. But false theories, like popular superstitions, die hard, so that the study of human varieties has suffered and still suffers owing to errors in observation and investigation and more, perhaps, owing to the racial bias or conventional prejudices of the student.

Examined in the light of the intellectual life of the so-called superior and inferior races, their psychology reveals remarkable unity of mind. Their overworked physical peculiarities and divergences appear to be mere accidental modalities attendant on their evolution in the past, in no way effacing the substratum common to all humanity. All the branches of the human family, according to recognized authorities, seem to be



## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

equally good or bad, and equally improvable or susceptible of deterioration. Their virtues and vices are merely the consequences of changing circumstances or the influence of environment. Given a number of generations, the 'savage' may equal, perhaps even transcend, the civilized man of today. Cultural diversity should, therefore, be regarded as but a passing phase. While a fairly uniform cultural level is desirable to ensure fellow-feeling and harmony, national unity is not and need not be conditioned by it. The sense of fellowship and world community is latent in man. Left to himself man has always felt kinship with creation. What is true of individuals is true of groups also. Moreover, so far as India is concerned, such diversity of culture as now exists may be regarded as only skin-deep. Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians have met and mingled so long in India that they have been greatly influenced by the cultural ideas, art, architecture and the mode of life of one another. Let us examine the problem from the point of view of Hindus and Parsis.

### Aryan Origin of Hindus and Parsis

In the dim old days the Aryan ancestors of the present-day Hindus and Parsis lived together in a region not yet definitely located. According to the *Avesta*, the Aryas (the noble ones) had their original home in the fair land of *Airyaana Vaejah* (the cradle-land of the Aryas). Some locate it in the northern steppes of Turkestan, others in

Central Asia and others in the Arctic regions. According to the Parsi scriptures there was such a large increase in human beings and animals during the reign of King Yima that *Airyana Vaejah* could no longer contain them. Thrice the illustrious king, surnamed the Shepherd, led his overflowing flock towards the south, 'on the way of the sun'. Thus were the boundaries of their homeland extended. But Angra Mainyu, the Evil Spirit, inundated the country with an icy deluge, compelling the shepherd-king to migrate with his men, his flocks and herds, to a temperate clime. The same beloved name *Airyana* (Iran) was given to the new home, and it still remains the name of the country where the progenitors of the modern Hindus and Parsis once kept together as one race, spoke the same language, followed the same religion, performed the same ceremonies and observed the same manners and customs.

Society in Iran was then unsettled. People were constantly on the move in search of fresh fields and pastures new. Even so, the type of civilization prevailing in those days may be said to have passed the stage called 'primitive'. The social organization was so far developed as to have led to the functional classification of the population into three grades, *Atharvan*, *Rathaeshtar* and *Vāstriya*, priests, warriors and the rest, who in that age were almost all agriculturists, corresponding to the three Vedic classes, Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaisya. Tradition associates the name of Yima with this classification, but the Avestan

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

works, which speak of these graded social orders in their earliest formation, show the prophet Zarathushtra as their originator. These three classes are usually mentioned in the Avestan texts, whereas the fourth class *Huiti*, the artisan, is mentioned only once. It is only late in the Pahlavi period that we are introduced to the complete group of the four orders.

### Cultural Contacts

With such scanty material as is available in the sacred literature of Iran and India, it is difficult to say with any degree of precision when the two groups of the Aryan race parted company. Common references to rivers and places in the sacred books of both the countries point to Afghanistan as the last place where they had at one time lived together. Thence the two branches seem to have separated between 2000 and 1500 B.C., one settling itself in Bactria and the other migrating south-eastward behind the Hindukush and entering India by the passes of the north-west and thence spreading eastwards towards the Gangetic valley. Since that time they appear to have been in touch with each other. References to the Iranians of the Parthian dynasty are found in *Manu* (x. 43-44) and in *Natrayashastra* (xxv. 89). Similarly, there are direct references to India in the *Avesta*. The name Hindu itself is Iranian. The country watered by the seven rivers of the Indus, *Sapta-Sindhu* (seven rivers) of the *Vedas*, is mentioned in the *Vendidad* as *Hapta Hindu*, by which name India was known

to the ancient Iranians. The Indus had then seven branches and not five, which subsequently gave the country through which it flows its later name Panjab. Then the prefix *hapta* came to be dropped. The Avesta word Hindu for Sindhu reached Greece, and as the Ionians had no aspirate, they spoke of the river as Indus and of the people inhabiting the country as Indians.

Scholars testify that the Ahura, God, of the *Avesta*, is the Asura of the *Vedas*. Varuna of the *Vedas* is the same as Ahura Mazda of the *Avesta*. In the *Rigveda* Varuna is credited with omniscience; so is Ahura Mazda mentioned as the all-knowing in the sacred books of the Iranians. The civilization of each group stressed the harmony between the individual and the universal life. Both taught man that he was in close relation to things around him and that he should pay his homage to the rising sun, the flowing water, the fruitful earth and the sacred fire as manifestations of the same Eternal Soul that has created all and governs all. It is unnecessary to overlay this paper with details concerning the parallelism of thought or the correspondence in the mythology, observances and customs of the two most important branches of the Indo-Iranian stock of people. What is of greater importance for our present purpose is their influence on each other after their separation till this day.

About twenty-five years ago, the attention of the world was pointedly drawn to the influence of Iran upon India by two memorable archæological

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

excavations of the ruins of the ancient cities of Taxila and Pātaliputra (modern Patna) by Sir John Marshall and Dr D. B. Spooner respectively. The discoveries made at these seats of ancient civilization furnished archæological evidence to establish that there had been from the earliest times an interchange of treasures of mind and spirit between the Iranians and Indians and that the Mauryan Empire was influenced largely by Iranian polity and civilization not only in regard to architecture but also in regard to various features of administration and court customs.

To Lord Curzon belongs the credit of instituting a new era in the organization of the study of Indian culture. India owes the creation of the Archæological Survey of India, as it exists today, to his fervent desire and determination to be a faithful guardian of the treasure-house of art and learning committed to his charge during the term of his Viceroyalty. Under Sir John Marshall's guidance site after site was excavated, including the key sites of Sanchi, Taxila, Sarnath and Bhita. These and the later excavations at Pātaliputra, at Harappa on the Ravi and at Mohenjodaro on the Indus give us a picture of civilization adapted to local conditions and adjusted to specific environment but revealing at the same time a remarkable resemblance in cultural traits common to the civilization which flourished in the fourth millennium in Sumer and Babylon.

A Melting-pot of Cultures

After the invasion of India by Alexander, Hellenistic culture springing from a union of Iranian with Greek influence dominated north-western India. Then, a little over thirteen hundred years ago, Parsi fugitives from Iran settled in Gujarat and other parts of the country, and from about A.D. 1000 Muslim conquerors, particularly the Moguls, brought Islamic culture to bear on Hindu life and thought. The regeneration of Hindu painting and the synthesis of what we call Hindustani music are the most outstanding illustrations of such cultural affinity. During more recent times Christian missionaries introduced Christian ideas. Thus India has been, so to say, the melting-pot of different cultures from the fourth millennium to the present day. During this period she has also been in close political, economic and cultural contact with the West.

The Empire of Cyrus and Darius extended from the Mediterranean to the Indus. When the Iranians exercised sway over north-western India, the association of the two kindred peoples led to a fusion of religious ideals and cultural concepts. The excavations referred to above bear testimony to such unity of outlook and interests. When, after a lapse of sixteen centuries, the Parsi emigrants sought shelter in India and lived with Hindus as refugees, they adopted Hindu ideas and customs and allowed even some of their religious cere-

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

monies to be influenced by corresponding Hindu rites to such an extent that one could hardly distinguish a Hindu from a Parsi either by name or by costume, by religious rite or by mode of life. Whether the rulers were Hindu, Muslim, Dutch, French, Portuguese or English, they lived together in peace as good neighbours on most friendly terms. The tide of nationalism had not yet set in. It mattered little who ruled. What held the two people together was a healthy sense of neighbourliness and civic brotherhood.

### Intensification of Communal Differences

It was only after the apple of discord was thrown in their midst during the latter half of the last century in the shape of an official appointment, or membership of a local body or legislature, that there was a rift in the lute and people began to hear, although mostly in whispers, of Hindu-Parsi jealousies. The Muslim was out of the picture for several years, as he took to English education long after his Hindu and Parsi brethren had begun scrambling for posts and positions in the public life of their province. When, however, he did appear on the scene, the contest for loaves and fishes and economic competition incidental to an industrial age intensified what religious differences there were between the followers of the Hindu and Islamic faiths. Gradually these differences assumed a political colour, and since the birth of the Indian National Congress a section of the Muslims, along with the Anglo-Indian community,



has remained in constant fear of being submerged under a Hindu *raj*.

The ears of the chronicler are deaf to harmony. He records only the discordant notes. If two members of a family or two groups of people within a community or a nation live together in peace for ages, scarcely anyone takes note of it. But the moment they fall out, the story of their feud forms an interesting theme for gossiping neighbours and the press, and through these channels it reaches the historian. For hundreds of years Muslims and Hindus have fraternized with one another and lived in peace in villages and even in cities, conscious of the essential unity of their cultural life and tolerant of the differences in regard to matters admitting of diversity. Those long chapters of history are forgotten, but the episodes of passing prejudices and disturbances stirred up by religious bigots or other mischief-makers are presented in lurid colours.

It may, indeed, be asserted without fear of contradiction that it is not religious divergences between the different groups of the population but political and economic rivalries that militate against national unity. Religious divergences there are, no doubt, and religious bigotry persists even amongst the educated people. It may seem an anachronism but it is nevertheless true that in India, as elsewhere, despite progress in education and development of social and economic organization, the old-time religion of emotion, forms and dogma still unhinges the minds of persons of



## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

high intelligence and culture. Their anti-social instincts and racial jealousies, inheritances of a savage past, continue to disturb the harmony which the founders of all religions wished to promote. It may yet take years of progress before the religion of emotion and irrationalism gives place to the religion of reason and the doctrine of humanity and dedication to the love and service of one's fellow men. Meanwhile, in different spheres of life, bigots will continue to hamper the fellowship of men and the fellowship of faiths. But despite such obstacles the world will forge its way, as it has in the past, to the goal of human unity.

### Who are the Communal Exclusionists?

Within the large groups what classes prize communal exclusiveness? Fanatical priesthood in each group may wish to keep the different groups apart, but in the political life of India priesthood scarcely counts. The most vocal and influential classes working for exclusiveness are the intoxicated communalists, pseudo-nationalists and puny politicians who feel that they can thrive only in an atmosphere of strife. The worst exclusionists, one has to admit with shame, are some of the educated men and women prominent in public life. They are the most bare-faced disturbers of the peace of the country, shattering all hope for unity.

There is another class of exclusionists, less sordid and less aggressive but nevertheless most

harmful. Just as religious bigotry is still rampant in the world, there is such a curse as cultural bigotry. Pride of pedigree, false notions of national greatness and perverted loyalty to a glorious cultural heritage lead some people to arrogate cultural superiority to themselves. Their culture, they believe, is the only culture and they would either have others embrace it or have nothing to do with them. They forget that no one civilization is complete in itself and that different communities have something special to contribute, according to their genius, to the common culture. Civilization is fellowship, and fellowship knows no religious or racial barriers. In India there are more religious divergences than anywhere else in the world. Even should they continue, there is no reason why they should constitute a bar to national unity or communal co-operation. There is certainly no need for 'minority provisions' or 'cultural regions' to keep together the different groups of people. The growth of the idea of human unity is the only line along which humanity can progress, and anything perpetuating or tending to perpetuate the division of people into religious, regional, functional or cultural groups must be regarded as an obstacle to progress.

#### The Doctrine of Humanity

The next question is, 'If it is desirable to overcome religious divergences and exclusiveness, how can this be brought about?' The obvious

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

answer would appear to be: 'Unite the different communities under the standard of a universal religion.' The pages of history, however, bear testimony to the impracticability of achieving such unity so long as religion means to people what it has meant for them in the past. The most notable attempt made in this country towards the enlistment of all people under the standard of a common faith was that of Akbar. It failed, and so would other attempts to secure uniformity of belief in the realm of religion fail. Various churches and faiths have existed and will, it seems certain in the light of the history of human evolution, still exist for ages. But so have people been divided in the past and will continue to be divided in regard to their political creeds and group loyalties, and yet they have marched forward to the goal of national unity. Their love for and their loyalty to their country have been the most potent factors in uniting them despite differences in regard to social, economic and political problems.

The gospel which can unite all human souls under one standard of universal religion is the gospel of Humanity. It will not be a religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It will not be a revealed religion. It will have to be evolved by the combined effort and co-operation of men of good will on earth. Man cannot be transformed overnight. The transition from the old-world tribal religions to the new and universal religion will take ages of human progress upon the earth. But the process

has already commenced. The new faith is being evolved slowly and steadily, modifying men's outlook on life and their attitude concerning problems of human relationship and conduct. In the past, religion has dealt with the next world rather than with this world. Its principal concern has been the salvation of individual souls, the individual and his attitude of faith and conduct directed to a power without, rather than the individual and his relation to his fellow-creatures. The religion of the future will, however, deal with this world more than, if at all, with the next world. It will aim at the salvation of human society through the perfection of human intercourse brought about by a fellowship of faith, by which is meant all forms of consciousness or conviction and all ideals of human conduct and relationship which influence the lives of people.

According to Hindu philosophy self-knowledge is man's highest mission, self-fulfilment his highest destiny. Knowing his true self, he comes to know the Universal Self, of which he is a spark, and to realize the harmony of man's spirit with the spirit of the Universe. In the light of such knowledge he apprehends also his kinship with his fellow-creatures. The profound significance of the formula *tat twam asi*, 'That art Thou,' is then crystal clear to him—'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, because thou art thy neighbour'.

Herein we have the core of the world religion, the doctrine of Humanity, the highest expression of advancing civilization. Not by political pacts,

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

nor by constitutional devices, but by the acceptance of this larger and nobler conception of religion may man hope to overcome the differences that divide people. In proportion as this concept of religion penetrates society, the stereotyped racial and retrograde distinctions will fade away and the different groups of people now kept apart will be instinct with that spirit of love and charity which neither fears nor loathes as alien people of different colour or creed but knits them together as sons and daughters of the same family and sharers in the same destiny.

By SIR SARVEPALLI  
RADHAKRISHNAN

WE are witnessing today the end of an era, the agony of a whole civilization, the liquidation of forces in which we have all been steeped. This world war which is heaping gratuitous and senseless horrors on helpless and harmless people is not to be traced to the malevolence of a few individuals, nor is it to be dismissed as the conflict of rival imperialisms. It is the proclamation of the bankruptcy of the present world order which is marked by the decline of spiritual life and the degradation of moral values. The great instruments of human welfare like science, technology and organization have failed to achieve their purpose. The ideals of peace and goodwill have not been able to stand the test of reality. Our life is secularized and we are engaged constantly in a struggle for material ends, for the control of markets and territories. To succeed in our aims, we degrade ourselves to the animal level. The marvellous feats of our mechanized world are not distinctively human. They are tricks which highly intelligent animals can be trained to perform. The more we perfect the process of mechanization, the more do we approach the impersonal life of bees and ants. We are inclined to overlook the truth about human beings that they are persons who know and love, who hope and pray. The values of life, the domestic decencies, the

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

simple affections, the savour of friendships, the pursuit of holiness are all delicate, fragile and contingent, and do not get a chance in a blind and insane world from which spiritual qualities are evacuated. Where spiritual knowledge is lacking, there is nothing which prevents society from falling into decay. This civilization which is abandoned by grace is like a body without a soul. It has a brain but no heart; it has a will but no soul. The mind is active but the spirit is asleep. Instead of the pursuit of sanctity, we have the cult of power, which is an intoxicant beside which other intoxicants are light and soothing. Hitler is the naked expression of the bad tradition in all its frenzy and hideousness.

Thinking sensitive men are feeling terribly lonely and scared in a world which has lost its meaning. They feel that the world of modern man, built on agnostic reason, is falling to pieces. Out of the throes of agony must be born a new vision and a new mood. If the world's trend towards barbarism is to be checked, we must return to faith in spiritual values. Only such an access to spiritual reality can transfigure the world and restore its health.

### The Spiritual Basis of all Religion

Hindu culture has emphasized for nearly fifty centuries the primacy of the values of spirit. This primacy of spirit has its roots in the very depths of India's history and has penetrated and dominated everything. The vitality of a culture is



established by the fact that it produces, from time to time, men who from their personal experience confirm and correct truths enunciated by those who preceded them. When the springs of experience dry up, the culture becomes an affectation, belief a dogma and behaviour a habit. The uninterrupted continuity of Indian culture is demonstrated by the apostolic succession of saints, who assert that they speak from experience. The Vedic seers claimed it and the modern representatives of that tradition urge that their lives and works are a commentary on the great truths of the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads*, a new formulation of the ancient wisdom of India, *prajñā purāṇi*. The Vedic canon on which the Hindu religion is based registers the experiences of the seers who realized that the eternal longings which man bears in the very fibres of his being cannot be satisfied by any changes in the empirical world of passion and action. The recognition of the Supreme Spirit which is also the Universal Self and submission to that spirit of the individual in thought, feeling and will is the essence of religion and the true destiny of man. Religion consists in such a transformation of the human individual as will enable him to establish contact with the Supreme (*brahmasamsparsa*). It is not so much belief in God as experience of God. If, in spite of centuries of religious teaching, we have not been able to bring about an adequate re-education of the human race, it is because we have looked upon religions in an external or objective way. The Hindu religion



## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

requires us not only to believe in God but realize God in our life. Hindu culture and religion are based on this pure tradition of mystical enlightenment, which is incorporated in the great treatises of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagvadgītā*.

While other religions are inclined to emphasize dogmas and authority and thus divide humanity into rival camps, the Hindu religion lays stress on the subjective features of religion to the realization of which all dogmas and rites are pathways. Though the Hindu believes in the authoritative-ness of the *Vedas*, he affirms that other scriptures which record the insights of seers who have attained *āpti* (God-realization) are also authoritative. The *Āgamas* are declared to possess canonical authority along with the *Vedas*. The canonical scriptures of the Hindus are not closed books. They are interpreted liberally and are added to as spiritual life evolves. With its empirical basis, the Hindu religion is in accord with the spirit of science. We are not called upon to believe this or that book because it is the revelation of God. The authority of the *Vedas* is derived from the validity of the experiences which they record.

If a world-society on healthy lines is to be built it can only be on the basis of a world-religion. The ground-plan of such a religion is to be found in the mystic tradition of India. But religions as ordinarily understood are unable to come to an understanding with each other and

interfere with the development of human fellowship. Hinduism, however, represents an effort at comprehension and co-operation. The different dogmas give imaginative presentations of the basic truth of the divine in us. We cannot dispense with them, as they are the ways by which we envisage the eternal under the forms of time, the unchanging counsels of God under the forms of the changing world. Poetry, myth and symbolism have their place in religion. Their purpose is to serve as pathways to spiritual awakening and development. The creed is the starting-point. Belief is the precursor of action. It directs the will. All creeds are attempts of the finite mind to grasp the infinite. They are all valuable in so far as they help us to reach the ultimate goal. They are different because they are adapted to the different needs of the people, their race and history, their sex and temperament. But they are all tentative and so there is no justification for intolerance. Religion should not be confused with fixed intellectual conceptions. Any religion which claims finality and absoluteness desires to impose its own opinions on the rest of the world and civilize other people after its own standards. When two or three systems of belief attempt to bring all people into their own frames, they are bound to clash, for the world has place, if at all, only for a single absolute. We do not see the ludicrousness of these clashing absolutisms simply because we are so familiar with them. When religious life is

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

confused with the profession and acknowledgement of revealed truth, it becomes dominated by outward machinery. The priest, the church, or the book takes the place of the spirit, and subscription to the creed is the one thing universally demanded. If you profess the creed and join the group, certain privileges and immunities belong to you now and for ever. Compared with life, the machine is too simple, its action too obvious, its results calculable in an absolutely definite manner by means of census reports and statistics, but its influence is directed only to the surface of our nature. If we think that it is right for us to propagate our religion at the expense of others through the employment of force on the ground that ours is a higher religion, we are guilty of moral contradiction since oppression, injustice and cruelty are the very negation of spiritual wisdom and sublimity. Hinduism has no fixed creed by which it may be said to stand or fall, for it is convinced that the spirit will outgrow the creed. For the Hindu every religion is true, if only its adherents sincerely and honestly follow it. They will then get beyond the creed to the experience, beyond the formula to the vision of the truth. Saṅkara, for example, speaks of six orthodox systems of religion.

The common goal of all religions is spiritual life. All religions are quests in search of this goal. They do not differ in their aim but only in the extent of the progress which they are able to make with the aid of their varying lights. If we

compare one religion with others, we shall see that the differences relate to the formulas and practices. When we go behind dogmas and creeds and get down to the depths of our own religion we discover that all religions draw their strength from the same unfathomable source. The recognition of this fundamental unity should make possible a certain measure of co-operation on a common basis for the good of mankind as a whole. Even in regard to the theological formulation, there is now a possibility of larger uniformity. Like the nation-states the great religions arose and developed in restricted areas of the world when intercourse with the rest of mankind was difficult. But now, through the influence of science and trade, a world culture is shaping itself. All religions are now attempting to express themselves in a new idiom and so are approximating to one another. The relevant elements of modern thought are vitalizing all religions and a community of outlook is growing up. Untenable doctrines are not so much refuted as set aside, and the universal elements of religions on which there is agreement are emphasized. Whatever our religions may be, we are describing them in terms of modern thought and criticism. This process will be speeded up in years to come and the gradual assimilation of religions will function as a world faith.

The principle of toleration has been an accepted tenet of the Hindus. Aśoka and his successor Daśaratha patronized the atheist Ājīvakas. Manu

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

requires us to uphold the usages of heretics.<sup>1</sup> Yājñavalkya recognizes the customs of the heretics.<sup>2</sup> In short the duty of protecting men of all creeds and none was enjoined on the rulers.

### The Need and Opportunity for a Reformed Hinduism

As social beings it is our task to maintain the values of spirit in the sphere of human life, home, society and polity. Through this human world we have to progress to the kingdom of spirit. The *Brhādaranyaka Upaniṣad* states that family life, property and other possessions are to be used as the apparatus for the realization of our spiritual resources, *ātmanastu kāmāya*. The whole cosmic process has for its end, to use Saṃkara's expression, *avagati* or spiritual freedom. The earthly is the raw material to be moulded into the likeness of spirit. The essence of religion does not consist in mere ecstasies or ascetic mortifications but in humility, sweetness and charity, in going through the day's work with patience and calm.

Hinduism has suffered in recent times from a lack of elasticity in regard to social rules and institutions. It has overlooked the cardinal feature of the evolution of Hindu society, that while the truths of spirit are eternal in their value, they are elastic in their application. The result has been a diseased condition of social organization,

<sup>1</sup> IV. 61.

<sup>2</sup> II. 192.

where disunity and suppression of individuality are the prominent features. We have exalted rule and routine over life and feeling. The Hindu *dharma* has been changing in response to the changing circumstances, and through these changes has succeeded in remaining its ancient self. Nothing is so subversive to society as a blind adherence to outworn forms and obsolete habits which thrive by mere inertia. It is our duty today to discover the true countenance of Hinduism and let its spirit penetrate the structure of our society. Manus says: 'Know that to be *dharma* which is cultivated by the learned, the elect, those who are always free from hatred and passion, and which is at the same time readily responded to by the heart.'<sup>1</sup> Such a view gives us ample room for liberty of action in social matters. In this fateful hour, we must listen to fresh notes as to ancestral voices. The price of social freedom is not only eternal vigilance, but perpetual renewal, the ceaseless activity of the creative spirit. If our society is to progress, radical changes in the social order are obligatory. Old creeds have lost their power, and old institutions their prestige, and yet the spirit of India's past is a living one and reveals its secret anew to each succeeding generation. We must purge our society of man-made inequalities and injustices and provide for all, men and women, high and low, equality of opportunity for personal

<sup>1</sup> vidvadbhih sevitaḥ sadbhih nityam adveṣarāgibhih  
hrdayenābhyanuññāto yodharmas tam nibodhata.

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

well-being and development. *Dharma* is an elastic tissue which clothes the growing body. If it is too tight, it will give way and we shall have lawlessness, anarchy and revolution; if it is too loose it will trip us up and impede our movements.

The Hindu system of religious thought and practice, I have no doubt, will evoke a response from the inquiring minds of the present generation. It is an outlook on life which satisfies the intellect, stirs the feelings and spurs the will to action. It gives India a new soul in harmony with that of the new world, makes it into a living organism with a vision and a will. It can reconcile the deep-rooted and diverse traditions and enable them to live in amity and freedom. India is still in the making. Public opinion is unfortunately confused, hesitant, divided, not clearly led, almost pathological, and yet Hinduism by its emphasis on the true spirit of religion, inward harmony and outer fellowship, provides the corrective to our distracted age.



## By SIR JOGENDRA SINGH

CULTURE ! What visions of immeasurable achievements it conjures up with its promise of moral and material progress and its fruit—happy and healthy living.

To cultivate the mind is a peculiarly human prerogative, and the result of such cultivation is the inheritance of the culture of mankind. The process is unending: just as a husbandman continuously ploughs the soil and prepares the seed-bed, so is mankind continuously engaged in purifying the mind and sowing it.

Culture reflects itself in conduct. A well-cultivated mind is free from malice. It learns to forgive and forget and grows strong along the paths of virtue, of clean thought and correct action. It knows how to adjust itself to changing circumstances. An ill-cultivated mind, on the other hand, is always at conflict with itself—dominated by discord, disappointment and despair. The five enemies of human peace—passion, anger, greed, attachment and conceit—spread their gloom and drive man relentlessly to his doom. True culture frees it from their subjection and constantly endows it with the spirit of beneficence, giving it the power to discriminate between right and wrong.

### True Culture

It is not possible, therefore, to restrict the field of true culture and confine it within the narrow



## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

limits of a country or community. Indeed, it is the futile, contentious spirit of sect, of creed, of party and the wrong sort of self-esteem, combined with the fatal power of inherited tradition and inveterate prejudice, which clog like wild weeds the field of true culture and effectively prevent its growth.

We speak of Eastern and Western, Hindu and Muslim culture merely to mark the stage which a country or community has reached in the cultural sphere as the result of its religious, social, economic and political achievements. The spirit of national unity and religious tolerance indicates a high stage of development, and the spirit of disunity a low stage. In truth the differences merely mark out different ways and stages of approach to the temple of truth.

Half-hatched ideas and convictions reared in the soil of national, economic and political rivalries prevent the recognition that all those who toil to serve the higher cause of humanity, which is true service of God, are friends and complements of one another. Guru Gobind Singh says, 'Know that this whole creation is His'.

It is difficult to discover any distinct cultural differences between the various communities inhabiting India. Where there is light there is no darkness and where there is bitterness there is no culture. A cultured mind is full of light and sweetness.

It is true that the people of India profess not one religion but many religions, and that their

## SIR JOGENDRA SINGH

ways of worship differ. They quarrel over many matters. The Hindu blows a conch, the Muslim sings his call to prayer; the Hindu burns incense and rings bells, and is demonstrative in his ordinary modes of worship; the Muslim offers his prayers in silence turning his face towards the Kaba. Each of them holds that his way is the best and they snarl at each other because their ways of approach to God differ. They object to the outer garments of religion, in which each denomination clothes itself, but in their everyday relations with each other men of different creeds carry on as good and helpful neighbours and follow the code of behaviour handed down to them by their ancestors.

Men pay reverence to their parents, respect the village elders and regard the mothers, sisters and daughters of the village as their own. The culture of the women is well exemplified by their good manners and their cultivation of industry and thrift and in the domestic arts of cooking and general household management. Neither men nor women expect much from life. They are satisfied if their small needs are met, and, when bad years come, they show an unparalleled spirit of resignation.

### Life in the Villages

Nearly 80 per cent of India's population lives in over half a million villages. The most powerful microscope applied to a village would reveal no great diversity of culture except in the outward appearance of those living in it. A Hindu may be

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

clean-shaven, a Muslim sport a beard and a Sikh wear his five distinctive symbols. But Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs rise with the dawn and occupy themselves with the same daily occupations; the agriculturist ploughs, sows and reaps, the carpenter and the blacksmith mend and repair the implements of agriculture, the women spin and the weaver weaves the cloth, and others perform their allotted task in perfect harmony, revealing an identity of interest and a steadfast spirit of neighbourliness.

The village people share the joys and sorrows of one another and help each other in their hour of need regardless of any differences in their religions. Hindus and Muslims do not eat together, nor do they intermarry; this is no part of their cultural achievement but marks its failure. It is clear, therefore, that the level of culture among the vast bulk of our population is fairly uniform and that divergence in their religious beliefs does not affect the neighbourly feeling existing among the people. The villages still retain some semblance of a well-balanced self-sufficing economic unity.

### Life in the Towns

Then there is the urban labour population. Here again men of all creeds share the common culture of industrial labour, which differs only slightly from rural culture. In the villages, there is a larger spirit of helpfulness and open hospitality; in the towns, competition entrenches upon the spirit of giving, and the cost of living narrows

## SIR JOGENDRA SINGH

the scope of hospitality. Then again, the various religious communities dwelling in the towns are affected by political currents and are made aware of new political creeds. They fight when any of their established customs, such as taking out a procession, are threatened with interference. It is such ceremonial occasions which lead to quarrels, rioting and other unpleasant incidents.

Now when we lift our eyes to the upper strata of society, to the captains of industry and the business class, here again community of interest permits no large cultural distinctive developments on communal lines. Captains of industry employ workers who have the necessary skill, regardless of the religion they profess, and trade depends on supply and demand and makes no distinction between the religion of producers and consumers. Indeed, business relations soften all angularities of temper and character and establish links which are so intertwined that Norman Angell believed that owing to this growing international community of interest the days of wars were over.

There is also the small professional class—doctors, lawyers, etc. They render common service and draw their clients from all classes and creeds; their cultural environment does not ordinarily permit of their cultivating antagonistic tendencies which some communal-minded politicians, who depend on the suffrage of separate electorates, regard as the hall-mark of a distinctive culture. Recruitment to the various public services takes

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

place on communal grounds, and here self-interest nurses the communal microbe, and as a result the services are losing the tradition which required all public servants to be above communal considerations. Happily the Indian Army, drawn from all classes and creeds, represents unity and affords a bright example of what common ideals and discipline can achieve.

### No Diversity of Culture in India

In my fairly long and eventful life, I have not been aware of any diversity of culture. I passed my infancy and childhood in the arms of a Muslim nurse; my boyhood spending long hours with my father's Muslim falconers; my youth with Muslim friends—and one of these was no less a person than Dr Iqbal, who sang of 'My India', who aspired to raise a 'Shivala' New Temple to draw all the people to worship at the shrine of the motherland, who exclaimed,

Religion does not teach hatred.

We are Hindees

And Hindustan is ours.

His inherited culture expressed itself in songs of unity, till political currents, unfortunately, carried him to the communal camp.

It must, however, be admitted that some of our politicians preach the gospel of separation in the name of distinct differences in culture, but they will be hard put to it to prove any difference in culture among ninety per cent of our population,

nor can they in their own selves conceal the gifts of a common heritage and evade the dictates of their own conscience.

### Material and Spiritual Culture

Culture has a twofold aspect just as man has a dual personality. It partakes both of the material and the spiritual. On the material side, it fosters the growth of individuality which endows man with faith in himself and drives him to seek his own profit and pleasure regardless of the rights of others. Nations under the sway of material culture, in spite of their professions, are all the time apprehensive of losing their position and constantly engaged in rattling their swords, manufacturing armaments and keeping their powder dry. This is the root cause of war. People who fight shy of making the smallest contribution, in time of peace, to promote human happiness, readily give away their lives and their all to uphold the independence and freedom of their countries. They worship at the shrine of Mars in preference to worshipping at the shrine of Christ. The war which was fought twenty years ago and the war of which almost the whole world is a victim today, are the result of tendencies which modern culture has failed to overcome.

The achievements of material culture have left no place safe from destruction either on the earth, sea or air. Science has found means of catching the voice of the world. It has subjected electri-

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

city to human service. It has enabled man to dive deep into the fathomless seas. Under its influence man has found wings, though the old saying, 'When an ant puts forth wings, it approaches its doom', seems very near the truth. Culture that carries us away from our fellow men is not God's culture. The kings and captains depart after their meteoric career, but the truths that the prophets have brought to this earth suffer no eclipse and the word of God remains.

In strange contrast with material culture is the culture of the spirit. It releases the soul of man from domination of the self and awakens sympathy with every form of human life. It converts self-affirmation into self-renunciation, violence into non-violence, desire into contentment. It teaches how we may enter the kingdom of God on earth and enjoy the treasures of earth as well as of heaven.

### The Concord of Religions

Religion unquestionably refines our nature, enlarges the sphere of our sympathies in time and eternity and our relations to the great beneficent cause of all—the one God. Religion, therefore, cannot be a source of discords, since it is the true source of concord. The great religious teachers speak with one voice. There is no discord between the sweetness of Buddha and his eight-fold path of salvation, the love for humanity that lighted up every word that Jesus Christ uttered, the declaration of the prophets of Islam that

SIR JOGENDRA SINGH

‘Whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold’, and the Sikh *guru*’s affirmation:

In the company of saints,  
All sense of otherness departs.  
There is no stranger, there is no enemy,  
There is a feeling of oneness with all.

Alas! It is the uncultivated soil of the human mind which fails to nurse the seed of religion and transforms religion into a sect, and, by doing so, rejects without examining the truth of religion and its saving power. Sect breeds pure prejudice, rendering sterile the soil of spirit, killing life’s worth and humanity’s advance. It is because of this sectarian spirit that followers of Islam concentrate more on outer observances, and followers of Hinduism, with their declaration that ‘God is One’—in complete accord with Muslim belief—and their metaphysical conception of the Absolute, still pursue paths of separation, which in their social and moral consequences are so inexpressibly disastrous, and so powerful in keeping the ordinary achievements of life at so low and meagre a level. They have reduced religion to a mere ritual and to the observance of taboos. A very high caste Brahman would consider his food polluted if cooked by a man of a lower sub-caste. It was this practice of untouchability which the Hindus extended to the Muslims. Its ridiculous consequences are seen in water being distributed as Hindu or Muslim water at all the railway



## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

stations. Guru Nanak protested against this many years ago:

You call grain and water Divine  
And butter the prime purifier.  
How can these be defiled  
But by contact with impure bodies?

These taboos have been, and are today, responsible for schisms which would have been bridged long ago if Hindus had shown the same tolerance in the matter of eating and drinking as they did in permitting freedom of belief. It is because of these day-to-day material contacts, which count for more than the true conversion of spirit, that Hindus and Muslims, who belong to the same race, who have a common cultural heritage, have failed to find a fusion and to become a united nation.

The question whether Western culture is dowered with the gift of a larger understanding cannot be easily answered. It must be admitted that new thought currents have progressively brought about many changes in the outlook of modern society. They have, as a Sikh *guru* puts it,

Broken the shell of superstition  
And set the mind free.

Human nature can expand and express itself in innumerable ways, but to what purpose? As an uncultivated soil secures no gifts from the sun and the rain, so man freed from responsibility to God has found no anchors and has become subservient to Moloch.

## SIR JOGENDRA SINGH

### The Role of the Central Government

The East will do well to follow the light that never fails; the light that has travelled and will continue to travel from the East to the West. Britain, too, will find salvation in the age-old policy of doing right, which gave her an empire over which the sun never sets. They who gradually built the British Empire in India instinctively discovered the secret of uniting India. They resolved to ignore all differences of creed and community and guaranteed equality of treatment to all under a reign of law. They wisely permitted the enjoyment of their personal laws to Hindus and Muslims. They readily shouldered the responsibility of protecting all communities in the legitimate performance of their religious ceremonies. They recognized merit in recruiting the services, and by their own example required all public servants to rise above communal considerations. They refused to recognize any difference in the culture of various Indian communities or to entertain any majority or minority claims. They established a strong Central Government which enforced its will in the provinces under the supervision and control of the Government of India. It was thus that India was placed on the path of nationhood. It is departure from this policy and the encouragement of communal and minority claims that has created the present situation. My own community, small in numbers but not so small in its contribution to the

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

stations. Guru Nanak protested against this many years ago:

You call grain and water Divine  
And butter the prime purifier.  
How can these be defiled  
But by contact with impure bodies?

These taboos have been, and are today, responsible for schisms which would have been bridged long ago if Hindus had shown the same tolerance in the matter of eating and drinking as they did in permitting freedom of belief. It is because of these day-to-day material contacts, which count for more than the true conversion of spirit, that Hindus and Muslims, who belong to the same race, who have a common cultural heritage, have failed to find a fusion and to become a united nation.

The question whether Western culture is dowered with the gift of a larger understanding cannot be easily answered. It must be admitted that new thought currents have progressively brought about many changes in the outlook of modern society. They have, as a Sikh *guru* puts it,

Broken the shell of superstition  
And set the mind free.

Human nature can expand and express itself in innumerable ways, but to what purpose? As an uncultivated soil secures no gifts from the sun and the rain, so man freed from responsibility to God has found no anchors and has become subservient to Moloch.

The Role of the Central Government

The East will do well to follow the light that never fails; the light that has travelled and will continue to travel from the East to the West. Britain, too, will find salvation in the age-old policy of doing right, which gave her an empire over which the sun never sets. They who gradually built the British Empire in India instinctively discovered the secret of uniting India. They resolved to ignore all differences of creed and community and guaranteed equality of treatment to all under a reign of law. They wisely permitted the enjoyment of their personal laws to Hindus and Muslims. They readily shouldered the responsibility of protecting all communities in the legitimate performance of their religious ceremonies. They recognized merit in recruiting the services, and by their own example required all public servants to rise above communal considerations. They refused to recognize any difference in the culture of various Indian communities or to entertain any majority or minority claims. They established a strong Central Government which enforced its will in the provinces under the supervision and control of the Government of India. It was thus that India was placed on the path of nationhood. It is departure from this policy and the encouragement of communal and minority claims that has created the present situation. My own community, small in numbers but not so small in its contribution to the

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

defence of its motherland, claims no class exclusiveness.

If India is to progress and realize its immense potential powers it must have a strong Central Government—strong and impartial, representative of all interests. It must not follow models of pure democracy or any exotic system, but with singleness of purpose must so constitute its government as to bring the most worthy men to serve the common weal, giving security to prince and peasant alike and assuring to minorities the full enjoyment of their special privileges. The Government of India must become and remain the vitalizing centre, guiding the provinces and assisting them to make a larger economic well-being more universally possible.

It is not in discovering and demarcating separate cultural regions but in ignoring them, not by dwelling upon divergences but by making them subservient to unity, that Britain can fulfil its mission and help India's millions along the path of self-government. Power will prove the most effective solvent and resolve all difficulties. Just as in the Indian Army discipline and control awaken an *esprit de corps*, so will strong government—in the future as in the past—draw all people together and obliterate all passing political differences.

### Britain's Opportunity

In this, the hour of the world's greatest need, united and self-governing India could be the most effective factor in leading all the people to

## SIR JOGENDRA SINGH

return to the paths of peace, 'for now sits Expectation in the air'.

In all times and all climes, sages and saints have spoken with triumphant unanimity on the cardinal principles of religion and good government. Abul Fazl, who adorned the court of Akbar, said:

Let the apostate glory in apostasy,  
The faithful in his faith,  
The distiller of perfume  
Requires only the heartache for others.

Akbar, by continuous discourse with Abul Fazl and the learned men whose company he frequented, discovered that 'the light of God is in all religions, with more or less shade in all'. He was convinced that a king could fulfil his kingly functions only by becoming a shadow of God on earth. This illumination gave him the key to the heart of peasant and prince alike. Her Majesty the late Queen Victoria inherited this gift of understanding from Akbar, when she declared her purpose and policy in the proclamation promising India equality of treatment and position, which became India's Magna Charta. It is because of this policy that Indian soldiers are giving their lives, without inquiring what they are fighting for, in the far-flung fields of the Empire.

It is also the result of the new policy of feeble-minded politicians dwelling on differences—which are in their power to overcome—that while war

## THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

is at India's door, her men of light and leading are waiting to know whether, in fighting for the Empire, India will also win her own freedom and become self-governing. To this British statesmen have given no clear answer.

The shortest and surest way to unite all communities is to endow British policy with one purpose only, to safeguard the integrity and security of India, and to rejoice in her march towards self-government. All human virtues increase and grow strong when practised.

59-2617

20-7-57

